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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS ED BESTIC  
DEPARTMENT FOR PM/WRA DAN HUTCHENS  
HANOI FOR JOHN WADE  
BANGKOK FOR SKIP KISSINGER

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2007 Annual UXO Review Meeting  
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1. (U) Charge and econoff attended the annual UXO review meeting June 5, which addressed the 2007 workplans for the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) and UXO Lao. The meeting provided a useful synopsis of events in the Lao UXO sector in 2006 and presented the UXO goals of the Government of Laos (GOL) for 2007. A number of interesting facts were presented. In 2006 approximately 4,700 hectares of land were cleared of UXO by all operators foreign and domestic. Of this total, 2,097 were cleared by UXO Lao, the GOL's national clearance operator. This was 115% of its 1,824 hectare target. UXO Lao has improved its clearance speed through a number of initiatives. Starting in 2006 it began to move from clearing 100% of the metal in a designated area to a 100% UXO-free "Battlefield Clearance" model that searches for objects half the size of a BLU-26 cluster bomb with fuse and ignores smaller objects or metal fragments. Additionally, UXO Lao began cross-training 72 of its medics and drivers as deminers. When there are two or more teams on one site, one medic and driver remain ready to assist any injured team members, while the others search for UXO. According to UXO Lao Senior Technical Advisor John Dingley, this innovation has greatly increased productivity, which has steadily risen from 800 hectares cleared in 2003 to the 2,097 cleared in 2006.

2. (U) The NRA's goals for 2007 are ambitious for an office that only officially opened in 2006. In addition to finalizing national UXO clearance standards and beginning the process to accredit all UXO operators in Laos, the NRA is also working to create a casualty surveillance capacity, piggybacking on an already existing Lao government health monitoring program. The hope is that by mid-2008 the NRA will have created a database that is continually updated, internet accessible, and contains all current UXO casualties. The project also hopes to count past accidents as completely as possible. The lack of reliable casualty information has persisted since 1975. Current estimates provided by UXO Lao range from 150-400 casualties a year, with the overall post-1975 figure between 11,000 and 13,000 casualties.

3. (U) One problem raised by several donors at the meeting is the slowness of the approval process for the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) required by the GOL before a new independent operator can begin work in Laos. Armor Group, the new USG contractor that distributes U.S. financial aid to

UXO Lao and the NRA, as well as managing the four technical assistants also funded by the USG, continues to wait for the signing of its MOU. Although the NRA has quietly allowed Armor Group's representative to begin work at the NRA office, continued uncertainty on when the MOU will be signed has slowed planned management training and could endanger timely disbursement of the USG's FY 2007 funding for UXO Lao and the NRA if the process continues to drag on.

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Lima Conference on Banning Cluster Bombs  
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¶4. (SBU) Somnuk Vorasam, NRA Deputy Director; Khonepheng Thammavong, MFA UN Division Chief; and Major Saichay Kommasith, Deputy Chief of External Relations at the Ministry of Defense, represented Laos at the May 23-25 Lima Conference supporting a treaty on banning cluster munitions. In their statement the Lao delegates indicated that the GOL would formally announce its intention to join both the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines and the potential treaty banning cluster munitions. Stephane Vigie, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, noted that one of the reasons for the GOL to join the two treaties is economic. According to Vigie, a number of traditional UXO donors (such as Norway and the EC) have refused to support UXO Lao until the GOL joins the Ottawa Treaty. He expects that after Laos, the country most deeply affected by cluster bombs in the world, officially offers to join the treaty banning cluster munitions, it will begin receiving additional UXO clearance aid. Vigie cautioned, however, that the statement appears not to have been cleared at the GOL's highest levels and might represent freelancing on the part of the Lao delegation.

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We're Number 1, for Now  
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¶5. (U) In 2006, according to Embassy Vientiane figures, the United States Government gave \$5.6 million to either the GOL or NGOs in Laos to help with UXO remediation, education, and victim assistance. Although we do not always receive sufficient credit from Lao news sources, our monetary contribution makes us the largest single funding source for mine action in Laos. While all FY 2007 funding decisions have not yet been made, we are likely to see the USG contribution fall compared to 2006. Unfortunately, this is putting us in danger of losing our crown. We are no longer the largest donor to national operator UXO Lao--Japan has assumed that mantle. Japan recently upped its total contribution for UXO cleanup to about \$2.12 million/year, not far below the level of our likely FY 2007 contribution. While USAID, and possibly USDA, will probably continue to fund some UXO projects, USG funding appears to be trending down, while other countries, including Switzerland and Ireland along with Japan, are trending higher. Embassy Vientiane believes there is significant symbolic importance to the U.S. being the largest donor in this sector.  
MCGEEHAN